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THE MAKING OF A DETECTIVE

**A Garda's Story
of Investigating
Some of Ireland's
Most Notorious
Crimes**

PAT MARRY

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*A garda's story of investigating some of
Ireland's most notorious crimes*

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Penguin
Random House
UK

First published by Penguin Ireland 2019
Published in Penguin Books 2020

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Set in 12.01/14.27 pt Garamond MT Std
Typeset by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-241-98531-1

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



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I dedicate this book to the loving memory of
my big brother, Austin Marry.

Austin and I loved to tell stories when we got together.

He was always fascinated by my experiences as a
detective and he was sure other people would be too.

It was with his encouragement and support that
I decided to write this book.

Unfortunately, we lost Austin suddenly in 2018.
His leaving us so soon has left a painful gap in all
our lives. Though he did not live to see my book
completed, I know he would be very proud
to see the story between covers.



Contents

Prologue: The Making of a Detective	1
1. The Dead Body Effect	5
2. A Disarming Killer	31
3. 'It's a burglary in progress, Detective'	63
4. The Frustrating Puzzle of a Meticulous Crime	104
5. Assault Causing Harm: The Paradox of Cause and Effect	133
6. The Devil is in the Detail	165
7. The Murderous Impulse	200
8. The Disappointments and the Hopes	235
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	263

Prologue: The Making of a Detective

When I came out of Templemore Garda College in January 1986, I wasn't a detective. I was nothing of the sort. I was twenty-four years old, with a number on my shoulder – 93E – and no way to influence the decision regarding where I'd be stationed. If you didn't have any pull among the seniors, you got the postings no one else wanted – usually protection duty. And that's what happened to me. I was sent to Donnybrook Garda Station in south Dublin, and given guard duty at the British Embassy on Merrion Road. After seven years working in the private sector, becoming a garda was a culture shock, to say the least. It was what I'd always wanted, but once I got it, I wasn't so sure. I'd had a vision of me as a uniform in public view, there to help and protect and make a difference, not as a cardboard cut-out, standing outside an embassy, achieving exactly nothing.

I remember a summer's night, the moon high and the breeze easy. I was outside the embassy and it was four o'clock in the morning and there wasn't a thing moving – not a car, not a person, not a bird, not a scavenging fox. It was just me, with absolutely nothing to protect the embassy from. So I walked out into the middle of the empty road and I lay down, in full uniform, and I looked up at the clear sky and said to myself: *There has to be more to life than this.*

I thought I'd feel like a proper garda once I'd made my first arrest. I'd learned the words off by heart and couldn't wait to use them. I finally got my chance on the beat on Clonskeagh

Road. There was an intoxicated man outside Smurfit's offices, and I arrested him for being drunk in a public place. I brought him to the station, where it dawned on me that he had been hoping to be arrested – he got a clean bed for the night, a hot meal and some entertainment with the lads on duty. One of them was getting married soon and he asked the man if he'd any advice for him. 'I do,' says my first proper arrest. 'Find a woman you don't like, buy her a house and be done with it.' He was enjoying himself, and he had me to thank for that. It was me who was taught the lesson that night, not the drunk man.

Fifteen years later, I tracked down and arrested a charming, cold-blooded killer – Colin Whelan. I count that as my first meaningful arrest. By then I had assisted on many investigations into violent deaths, starting with the murder of the Blanchardstown woman Marilyn Rynn in 1995. During that investigation I watched closely from the sidelines, absorbing everything the lead detectives did and said. That was the first case in which I felt I was finally on the way to becoming a detective.

Back then, there was no technical, strategic or psychological training within An Garda Síochána; no foundation course called 'How to Be a Good Detective' – it was up to the individual to want it badly enough and be intelligent enough to learn on the job. I wanted it, and I pushed myself forward onto the right teams, always listening, always learning.

The Whelan arrest was the moment I felt, for the first time, that I was a detective. I had earned it and proved it. I had pursued this killer for months in a delicate dance – him leading us first this way, then that, confident he was smarter than us, sure it would all be over soon, convinced the headstone over his wife's grave pronouncing him a loving husband would stand as a testament to his innocence. He underestimated us, and

he overestimated himself. That's a common problem among murderers. It gave me great pleasure to arrest Colin Whelan for the murder of his wife, Mary Gough, knowing I had every shred of evidence necessary to secure a conviction. He's still behind bars today.

And then there was the moment when I looked into the eyes of another apparently grieving husband, Joe O'Reilly, and every fibre of my being snapped with the electricity of knowing – gut-instinct knowing – that he had deliberately and violently killed his wife, Rachel. I didn't yet have proof, and he was playing the role of chief mourner with gusto, but my instinct was telling me he did it. I remember he was preparing for a photocall – there were cameras and lights, people bustling about Rachel's parents' house – and in the midst of it sat Joe, the sorrowful man. I was staring at the side of his head, thinking it all through, and he suddenly turned and looked straight at me. We held eye contact for five long seconds, and we understood each other completely without a word: I knew he had done it, and he knew that I knew. The game was on. By this time I had formed a detective's radar, and I believed I could trust it.

I had a long and fascinating and successful and sometimes soul-destroying career as a detective. I live with regrets, and I've seen and heard things that won't ever leave me. I've helped families by solving the mystery of how their loved one died, and I've had to look into the eyes of shattered parents and spouses while telling them that I can't put the murderer away, that I don't have enough evidence. It's all part of the job.

It was never easy, but it was never dull. I never again lay on the ground and wondered why life was passing me by, that's for sure. I learned how to be a detective, a good detective, and that was what I'd wanted all along.

1. The Dead Body Effect

The house gave no sign that it had been the scene of a violent murder the night before. There should have been a sign, though, because there should have been a uniformed garda standing watch outside. I'd have expected him to be at the gate, or maybe pacing between the gate and the front door, or even leaning against the wall sneaking a fag – that was possible too. I was parked at the kerb but there was no one in sight, and certainly no uniform. From where I was sitting in the car, I could see a key sticking out of the front door lock. Anyone could walk right in. The body was still in situ.

I checked the house number again. Yes, I had the right house. So where was the cop who was supposed to ensure that no one disturbed the crime scene?

I watched for a while, just to make sure there was no sign of the garda being in danger – maybe the murderer had returned and dragged him inside? I knew it was unlikely, but still, I'd learned to expect the unexpected by then.

It was all quiet, so I got out of the car cautiously and made my way up the path to the front door. I let myself in with the key handily left there, and walked quietly down the hallway and into the sitting room. There I found the garda assigned to protect the crime scene. He was stretched out on the couch, sound asleep in his big, grey, Garda-issue overcoat. I could have danced a jig up the hallway in hobnail boots and he wouldn't have stirred. Next to him, on the floor, lay the dead body, a carving knife sticking upright from the bloody wound

in its chest. I tapped the garda and his eyes opened, and he took a moment to remember where he was. Then he got up, turned the couch over on its side and said, 'That's how it was, Pat.'

It wasn't the first time I'd seen a crime scene treated with such nonchalance, and it wouldn't be the last. When you start out, dead bodies are a difficult experience. It's hard enough not to run away, let alone look away. In those first years on the force, it feels like death will never be easy to deal with, but then something happens, and what's striking is how fast it happens. Somehow, one day you're just used to it – and to an extent you wouldn't have thought possible beforehand. The dead become a natural part of your world.

In a murder investigation, the victim is your friend because they hold all the answers that will tell you who killed them. It's a strangely intimate relationship. You pay more attention to them than anyone else in your life; you drill down to the minutest details; you learn every single thing there is to know about their past, their life choices, their love life and marriage. In a way, you feel close to them, and yet they can only ever be a dead body at your feet, an unspeaking witness to a sudden and horrible crime.

When the call comes through and you realize you're going to see your first dead body, it's unnerving. The immediate thought is that you have to be professional and appear unaffected, no matter what. At the same time, your stomach is knotted tight in fearful anticipation. The day of my first call-out was in the summer of 1987, when I was a uniform garda. A report of any incident always comes to a uniform first – usually whoever is manning the front desk that day – and they then pass it on to the relevant person. In this instance, my sergeant was the one it got passed on to, and he brought me along with him. As we drove towards the spot where the body

had been reported, I tried to steel myself for whatever it was I was going to see. I didn't know then that it's impossible to steel yourself against the smell of decay.

A woman's body had been found in a graveyard in Dublin West. I could smell the scene before I reached it. The stench was powerful, telling us clearly that the body must have been lying out here for some time.

She was exactly where the observant member of the public had said she'd be, curled up in a brambly ditch. I felt sorry for her, lying uncovered there on her own, next to the buried dead. Had she come here to die? Or had something happened to her in this place? The scene wasn't telling us much, so the results of the autopsy would have to be our guide.

That was my first dead body, and now I had to observe my first post-mortem. The rule is that the garda who attends the scene and finds the body must also be present at the post-mortem, to identify the body to the pathologist. So along I went to the morgue on a warm July morning, just twenty-four hours after her body had been removed from the scene. I found the whole experience deeply shocking. I was twenty-six years old, a garda for less than two years, and I had notions about how these things would be done.

I was wrong.

The first shock was when they opened the body bag in which she'd been transported from the graveyard to the mortuary – reversing a journey many had travelled before her. When the pathologist unzipped it, hundreds of white maggots poured out onto the stainless-steel table and skittered to the floor. Insects don't stand on ceremony, and they'd had seven days before the body was removed from the ditch, so they had taken up residence and made the most of their good fortune. The pathologist then peeled back the plastic

body bag to reveal the corpse and my stomach churned – rats had eaten her face, and the hollow, bloody mess where her face should have been was framed by her long hair. It was like something from a horror movie and I recoiled physically, desperately trying to steady myself.

The second shock was watching the mortuary attendant, who was tasked with removing her rings from her rigid clenched fists. He wrenched the fingers apart, breaking them in the process, the sound of the bony cracks ripping through the air and ricocheting off the metal surfaces. It seemed like an assault, but this crude approach was the only way the attendant could do his job.

But the most inescapable part of the whole experience was – just like in the graveyard – the stench. It was utterly overwhelming. There is a distinct smell to death, and it never leaves you. In fact, it got the better of me that day, in spite of my determination to be professional and unfazed. I had to get out of there and outside into fresh air, where I vomited and retched violently. I wasn't able to return to see the rest of the post-mortem. I just couldn't go back into close contact with that smell. As it was, I felt like it was clinging to me, seeped into my clothes and my skin. When I got home that evening, I showered and scrubbed for a long time, but I could still get that putrid smell, like it had taken root inside me. It was a deeply horrible after-effect of a difficult day. The next morning I talked over my reaction with a scenes of crime expert. He told me that the death stench gets caught in the nostril hairs, which leads to that feeling of smelling it continually, no matter if you scour yourself with a wire brush. He also described his first dead body and how badly he'd handled it, and that made me feel much better about my own 'failure'. It didn't make me a bad cop, after all. It made me a decent human being.

As for that first dead body, the post-mortem did tell us her story. She was a troubled woman who had suffered from mental health issues, and it obviously got too much for her and she took an overdose. Then she walked to the graveyard, lay down in the ditch and died. I felt it was a terribly sad ending to a young life, to feel so isolated and so hemmed in that there was nothing else but death. It was an early and important lesson about the effect of mental illness on a person, and one I carried with me into every case I worked on. As a garda, you get to hear the dead person's story, but you also get to see the end of their story played out in the lives of those they leave behind. The anguish of the loved ones is very hard to witness, and that's something that never becomes so familiar that you can be blasé about it.

After that first experience of a post-mortem, I was apprehensive about death and dead bodies. But there's no room for such sensitivity when you've got ambitions to be a detective. And in the end I got cured of it the way most recruits get cured of it – by spending a night with a corpse.

It happened when I was a young uniform in Blanchardstown and got handed the nightshift: 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. in the morgue, watching over a murder victim. When a murder is committed, the body becomes one of the evidential exhibits, and as such it must not be interfered with in any way between discovery and the post-mortem. The way that's ensured is by having it accompanied at all times by a garda. I'd drawn the short straw this time, and I entered the mortuary at James Connolly Hospital at ten o'clock, facing eight hours alone in a room full of stainless-steel drawers holding the dead.

The body I was there to mind was laid out on a white marble slab, mostly covered with a white sheet. He was a young man,

and he'd been shot in the back of the head. He was lying on his back, face towards the ceiling, and his head and neck were raised on a plastic support block. At the end of the slab, behind his head, was a gully for fluids and matter to drain into.

I settled into a hard chair and stared at him. From time to time, blood dripped from the hole in the back of his head, plopping quietly onto the marble slab beneath. The sound of it got louder as the night wore on. My eyes moved from that hole to my watch and back again. Time slowed to a standstill and my every nerve was on edge. Suddenly, a noise rang out from one of the steel caskets. My heart nearly stopped in my chest. I glanced around, but I knew I recognized that sound. It was most definitely the sound of someone passing wind. I'd heard that dead bodies expel gas, and even groan sometimes, and now here was the proof, I supposed. I relaxed again, laughing a little to myself.

It wasn't a one-off, either. Over the hours of my shift, that sound broke the silence a number of times – loud farts that should by rights, I thought to myself, have woken the dead. I was grateful that there was no groaning. That would have been even more disturbing. It was a horrible sensation, to be the only living man in a room of dead bodies – especially the suddenly dead. It made me think about the fragility of life; the lad I was watching over had been playing sport when he was shot dead, full of life and vigour one second, dead on the ground the next. His life was paper-thin, and I didn't like thinking about that.

I was scared for much of my time keeping watch, but as the dawn light started its slow crawl across the metal surfaces, I realized that nothing had happened, and nothing was going to happen. They were all dead, and that was that. When I left the morgue at 6 a.m., I emerged with a sense that I could now cope with anything. The apprehension was dead too.

The truth is that humans are habit-forming, even about corpses. The effect of familiarity with death is that you become casual about it. I think some officers wear this as a badge of honour – that nothing can touch them, that they can brazen out the bloodiest crime scene with a joke and a hollow laugh. To an extent, I became like that too, but I'm not proud of it. I tried, always, to remember that I was dealing with a real person, not just a victim. It's an approach that leaves you open to more distress, but it can also sharpen your reading of a crime scene, can give you the courage to see the case through to its proper end. I think decency has a place in every good detective, and it's important not to lose sight of that, especially when violent death becomes a routine experience.

The thread that runs through all crime scenes and that anchors us to the victim is their story. It's hard to remain distant and unaffected when you get to know the person they were before they died. When a murder occurs and you spend weeks or months – or even years – piecing together a detailed picture of the victim in order to solve the crime, you form a sort of relationship with them, and that connection is a powerful tool in understanding how to solve their murder. I first learned this working on the murder investigation into the death of Marilyn Rynn.

The area where her body was found is known locally as 'the Tunnels'. It's at the top of Blanchardstown village, where a laneway leads under the road, staying underground for about fifteen feet before coming out near Brookhaven Drive, where Marilyn Rynn lived. It is sometimes called the Corduff Tunnel because it's located on the Old Corduff Road, and it's a handy shortcut that the locals use all the time.

In the early hours of 22 December 1995, it was very cold

and very dark in the Tunnels and the rain was hammering down. I can actually remember being on my shift that evening in Blanchardstown, and thinking to myself that it would be a quiet one. Between the bleak rain and the warm Christmas cheer of people's homes, who would be bothered going out to do mischief?

Regardless of the cold darkness of the tunnel, it was still the quickest route home and out of the bitter December air, which is why Marilyn headed that way after getting off the Nitelink bus. The bus stop was only a matter of minutes from her house, and it was a path she walked all the time. On this night, though, her journey ended in a call to Blanchardstown Garda Station to report a missing woman. Her brother made the call on 26 December, and by then he was very certain something was wrong because the fact that no one had heard from Marilyn was completely out of character.

It was three days before Christmas; people were preoccupied with the holiday, people were away, it was a messy time to go missing. There were false sightings that kept it a missing persons case for the next week. We had two neighbours swearing they had seen Marilyn on the morning of the 23rd, going to work as usual. This cast doubt on the 'missing person' conclusion and stalled the investigation. However, Marilyn's brother was adamant that his sister was in some kind of trouble. The idea of her missing a family Christmas was impossible. He knew something had happened to prevent her from going home and enjoying the holiday as usual.

About two days after she was reported missing, a detective went to Marilyn's house and checked it out. He saw her post accumulating on the doormat – more than usual, no doubt, because of the Christmas cards. His gut was telling him that Marilyn's brother was right, that something had happened to

this woman. Nonetheless, at this point we had to proceed with it as a missing person case as we didn't have any evidence to the contrary.

We drew up a plan of the Nitelink bus, and via a media appeal and a door-to-door questionnaire – which included a question to the effect of 'Did you travel on either of the 3 a.m. Nitelink buses on 22 December?' – we asked all the passengers travelling that night to come forward and identify the seat they had occupied. Three-quarters of them did so, and we put a big 'X' on the seats they had been in. The aim was to discover where Marilyn had been seated on the bus, and hopefully jog their memories so they could tell us where she got off and what direction she went in.

On the first round, no one could place Marilyn on the bus. The investigation sagged a little at that point, but local politicians – particularly Nora Owen, TD – were determined that the mystery of Marilyn's disappearance be solved, because it was causing alarm among the local population. They pushed some more money towards the investigation, which allowed us to go around the witnesses again. This time, a woman came forward with information. She had her reasons for not wanting to make it known that she was out and about at that hour on that night, but her conscience had been nagging her to tell the truth. She put an 'X' on Marilyn's seat and, crucially, told us she had seen Marilyn get off at the top of the village. Now we had Marilyn, alive, in the village, around 3.30 a.m. The logical next step in the sequence of events was that she walked home – and never got there.

At this stage, the key evidence that was keeping this as a missing persons case was statements provided by two witnesses, both of whom lived locally, who claimed they had seen Marilyn the day before Christmas Eve. The incident room tasked

me with talking to them again, to find out just how certain they were of what they had seen. They were very decent people, eager to help the investigation, and they both reiterated their accounts of seeing Marilyn. So I decided to check out their movements on the day in question, just to corroborate what they were saying. I went to the local supermarket where they both worked and examined the clock-in cards. What I found there shocked me, but of course I was new to the game back then. At the time when they claimed they'd witnessed Marilyn walking to the bus stop on 23 December, they were in fact at work, clocked in, verifiable. They hadn't seen her at all.

So now we knew that Marilyn was on the Nitelink, that she got off in the village and that no one had seen her since. It was logical to assume that she had taken her usual route home, through the Tunnels. On 6 January, a police search team went into the Tolka River Valley, planning to cover the area in and around the Tunnels. I remember the search team and their sniffer dogs in place that morning, ready to conduct the in-depth search. The signal was given and the group of men in search overalls followed the dogs into the thick brambles and bushes. We all settled down to wait, but it turned out to be the quickest search for a body I've ever witnessed. It took just fifteen minutes for one of the dogs to find the body, abandoned in the undergrowth.

Marilyn's naked body had been dragged and thrown into a tangle of bushes, her skin tinged blue by the extreme cold weather that had gripped the country over the Christmas period. Her handbag was discarded not far off, along with her clothes, and there were marks on her neck that suggested a violent death. The scene made it immediately clear that this was now a murder investigation, and the Garda Technical Bureau (GTB) was called in.

By this stage in my career, I was finally in a position to take part in a murder investigation. I was a detective in training by now – still a long way to go to earn the full title, but definitely on the way. My progress through the ranks had been slow compared to others, because I had no pull whatsoever. If you had family members who had been in the force or some other useful connection, it was possible to move up relatively quickly. But I was the first in my family to become a garda and had no connections of any kind. The only thing I had was my work ethic, and the desire to become a detective and prove myself to those higher up the chain.

I'd spent three years as a uniform, and in that time I did my level best to solve any case I was involved in. One of my best moments came when I was on the beat in Blanchardstown, and Mulhuddart National School was burned to the ground one night in an act of arson. The local community was extremely upset about this, and I went over with other colleagues to check out the scene. I had recently completed a ten-week scenes of crime training course, which included how to read an arson scene, so I went around the remains of the building carefully, seeing what I could find. In one room there was a lone desk, still standing, though badly burnt. Its drawers were open and it looked like it had been rifled through. On a hunch, I bagged some of the charred papers that lay inside and sent them off for fingerprinting. Sure enough, back they came with a match to someone on file for previous wrongdoings. That someone was a local lad we already knew had been seen in the field behind the school on the night of the fire.

I went to talk to the principal and she confirmed that the desk was hers and that she always kept it locked – and that prior to the fire she had locked it securely, as usual, and kept the key on her person. To my mind, that meant the suspect

could not have put his fingerprints on those papers other than on the night of the fire, after he'd bust open the desk. The rest of the evidence gathered supported this, and the young man was arrested and charged. He was adamant that it wasn't him, right up to the courthouse. He entered a not-guilty plea at the arraignment, and as a result the defence, prosecution and witnesses all gathered for the trial. I was the second witness and was ready to go with my findings. But just before the first witness – the crime scene mapper – was about to be called, the defence counsel stood up and said there was a change of plea. As he uttered the word 'guilty', the young man looked straight at me with a look that plainly said, 'Fuck you!' It was a great outcome, and the people of Mulhuddart were delighted that the arsonist had been found and put away.

This sort of work from a uniform wasn't all that usual, so it gained me the attention of some of my superiors. I was singled out by Detective Sergeant Derek Byrne, who put me forward as a plain-clothes junior member, known in the force as a 'buckshee' detective. That meant I wasn't a real detective yet – that I was there to prove I could become one. So I was an eager buckshee in 1995 when Marilyn Rynn was murdered. (I always wondered how buckshees got their name. As far as I can make out, it's because they weren't paid a full detective's allowance – 'buckshee' is a slang word meaning 'free of charge'.)

Once a murder has been announced on the news, everyone knows there will be a murder conference at 10 a.m. the following morning, and anyone who wants to be involved makes it their business to be there at the appointed time. Once it was clear that the Rynn investigation was a murder case, I made my way to the murder conference along with the

other detectives and buckshees, knowing this was a good opportunity to learn and to hopefully prove my worth. In 1995 the K District comprised Cabra, Finglas and Blanchardstown, with divisional headquarters in Santry, and all murder investigations in these areas were run through the incident room in Cabra. It was operated by one of the best incident room managers in the force, Detective John Lyons, and I learned a huge amount from watching him.

A real incident room isn't anything like the ones you see on television in crime dramas. There are no whiteboards, no pictures of the victim and suspects stuck up with thumb tacks, and no frantically scribbled lines to connect the evidence. It's actually a very calm place, at the eye of the storm of the crime and the investigation. The only furniture is a very long table that seats about twenty people. Chairs are reserved for the detective inspector leading the investigation and for the incident room team, but for everyone else it's first come, first seated. If you come late, you stand by the wall.

The incident room murder conference is a place to describe and discuss, and you do not speak unless you're spoken to – especially if you're a buckshee. The DI leads the proceedings, recording everything in the Jobs Book. This is the bible of the investigation, listing every job to be undertaken, with a name beside each one. Job 1 is the first report to a garda of the crime, whether by a member of the public or a colleague, and then the jobs are listed in chronological order – as many as it takes to conclude the investigation. As each job is completed, it's marked on the 'bingo card'. This is a grid showing all the job numbers, and when you state that your task is complete, an 'X' is put through that particular job number.

There are key roles to be filled for every murder investigation, including crime scene mapper, crime scene photographer,

scenes of crime officer, exhibits officer, family liaison officer, press officer, and technical analysts for CCTV and phones. The incident room is where all the information and evidence gathered is shared, dissected and evaluated. In any incident room, the victim becomes very real to the investigators, because we pore over every detail about them that we can find. It was during this process that I first realized and understood the strange relationship between victim and investigator – how you come to regard them as very real, very ‘alive’, even though you know them only in death.

As the information started to come into the incident room from the various lines of inquiry in the Marilyn Rynn investigation, a very clear picture of the victim emerged. She was an independent woman, forty-one years old, very happy in her own company and living alone, but also a great friend, sister, aunt and daughter. She loved gardening and keeping fit. She worked at the National Roads Authority and was a respected and much-loved colleague. It seemed that everyone who had met Marilyn enjoyed her good humour, her work ethic, her reliability and her great zest for life. She was a woman who had never harmed anyone – kind, trustworthy, intelligent and gentle. Her lonely, brutal death was totally at odds with her busy, caring life.

The Rynn case is famous in policing and justice circles as the first time DNA evidence was used in Ireland to secure a conviction – generating headlines such as *Killer trapped by his DNA* – but that’s far from the whole story. The solving of the riddle of Marilyn’s murder was also down to methodical detective work and perseverance. The senior officers knew the value of being on the ground and talking to people in the area, so door-to-door inquiries were made a priority. For door-to-doors, a questionnaire is compiled and every officer sticks to it, so that we capture the same information from every

interviewee. In the Rynn case, about 2,000 statements were taken – a vast amount of information to sift through, which was the job of the incident room team. As it happened, one of the doors we knocked on was the killer's. This is how I came to appreciate that taking a witness statement is an essential skill, one learned through experience, and that it can catch a killer as reliably as any technology.

When Garda John Carr knocked on the door of a house in Edgewood Lawn, a slightly built young man with long hair in a ponytail and a beard opened it and welcomed him inside. Asked about the night of the murder, the young man said he was at home that night, he hadn't got much to add to the investigation and he didn't know the dead woman. They talked some more, but then the man's wife came into the room and the detective explained why he was there. The woman was well aware of the murder, like everyone else around there, and she said she felt very sorry for the dead woman's family. Then she looked at her husband and said, 'Didn't it happen the night you were out?'

Now the detective was all ears, because this differed from what he'd just been told. So he looked at the man for an explanation, and the young man pleasantly described how he was out that night, at his office Christmas party, and ended up having to walk home. In fact, now that he thought of it, he did see a woman matching Marilyn's description. She was walking through the Tunnels in the company of a tall blond man – but that's all he could say about it. Then the next morning he got up, put on his clothes from the night before and went to work, all as usual. So now the detective started making more notes, because this last detail was interesting. It was raining cats and dogs that night he had walked miles home – why would anyone put on the same damp clothes the following morning?

The young man's name was David Lawler, and although he didn't know it, he had just become a person of interest to the investigation.

A person of interest occupies a sort of limbo between becoming a suspect and remaining a witness. The strategy used is TIE – trace, interview, eliminate. If you can't eliminate someone, but nor do you have any evidence to suspect them, they are a person of interest. As such, they can't be arrested, but they will be asked to submit a DNA sample in the event that samples are collected. They are on shaky ground, in other words, and it could give way beneath them if we find them out in a lie.

In order to move from a person of interest to a suspect, there must be 'good cause to suspect'. This is important because a suspect can be arrested and must give a DNA sample, which can be taken forcibly, if necessary. In the Rynn case, there were two known criminals who could have been in the frame. One was a very dangerous, violent man who was living rough in the Tolka River Valley, not far from where the body was found. The other was spotted in CCTV footage at a diner Marilyn had gone to that night before taking the bus home. He was in the queue behind her, and again he had a criminal record.

As it happened, DNA testing ruled out both of these men. And that was another lesson I took away from the investigation – not to jump to conclusions, even when something looks probable. This applies to forensic evidence as well, which might not be as straightforward as it at first seems. For example, a person could have legitimate access to a crime scene, meaning their DNA features at the scene, but they are in no way involved in the murder. This is a relatively common occurrence, depending on who finds the body and what their